

“Adventists And Easter Sunday Services”

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

This newsletter is somewhat unusual because it departs from the planned series of studies on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Within few days I will post the next Bible study on biblical principles for building a happy and lasting marital relationship. The many encouraging responses I received, clearly indicate that many of our subscribers appreciate all the help they can get in this area.

Some of the messages I received have deeply touched me. They have made me forcefully aware of the fact that there are Adventist couples who desperately need healing in their sterile and often hostile relationship. In some instances, there are spouses who are victims of abusive behavior and are seeking for guidance on whether or not to file for divorce.

Frankly, I feel that it is inappropriate for me to counsel people via email without a clear understanding of the complexity of the problems involved. Furthermore I have no professional training in marital counseling. Thus, I would rather stick to my goal to share with you the results of my investigation into the biblical teachings regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage. I sincerely hope that our SDA church will consider offering marriage counseling online, because it appears that many find it easier to seek help online without compromising their identity.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW MUSIC BOOK

Your response to the announcement of the new book on **THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC: A STUDY ON BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES OF MUSIC**, has surpassed my fondest expectations. Yesterday the phone kept on ringing non-stop the whole day. We received orders for over 500 copies in one day. If the orders continue to come in at this rate, the first printing of 10,000 copies will be almost sold out by the time it comes off the press on April 25.

If you have not reserved your autographed copy, be sure to call us at (616) 471-2915, so that we can mail you your copy as soon as the book comes off the press by April 25. Your credit card will not be charged until the order is processed. Many are ordering the book by the case of 30 copies. Feel free to call me for a special price. You can see the attractive cover of the book and read several chapters at my website: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>

An increasing number of Seventh-day Adventist churches are replacing choirs with “praise bands,” hymn books with overheads, organs with synthesizers, besides introducing drums and guitars as part of the repertoire of church music instrumentation. Many of you have told me that these changes in church music are causing controversies and divisions in your congregations. You will find that this new book written by seven scholars of six different nationalities, clearly delineates the issues and provides biblical answers to the problems which have caused so many Christians to stumble.

SPECIAL EDITION OF ENDTIME ISSUES “ADVENTISTS AND EASTER SUNDAY SERVICES”

The reason for posting this special edition of *Endtime Issues* on “Adventists and Easter-Sunday,” is simply because during the last few days I received numerous inquiries about the Easter-Sunday morning services that will be conducted in an increasing number of SDA churches on Easter Sunday, April 23. One inquiry came from the office of IT IS WRITTEN, since the telecast is sponsoring a special rally in Los Angeles on Easter Sunday morning.

The question many have posed to me is: “Should Seventh-day Adventist Churches join the rest of the Christian world in celebrating Christ’s resurrection with a special church service on Easter Sunday morning?” In answering this question a distinction must be made between conducting a church service on Easter Sunday morning for an evangelistic purpose and holding a service to celebrate Christ’s resurrection.

Evangelistic meetings are conducted on every day of the week. Scheduling a meeting for Easter Sunday morning can be a unique opportunity to help people understand the real meaning of Christ’s resurrection as an existential reality, rather than a liturgical festival.

In my view, planning for a special Easter Sunday service in Adventist churches to celebrate the event of Christ’s resurrection, poses two serious problems. First, it assumes that Christ’s resurrection is an event to be celebrated liturgically on Sunday by a special church service. We shall see that this assumption is devoid of biblical and apostolic support. Second, Easter Sunday services indirectly supports Sunday observance, since it is a known fact that both the weekly Sunday and the annual Easter Sunday, are viewed by many Christians as memorial days of Christ’s resurrection. For Adventists to reject the weekly Sunday’s celebration of the resurrection, while participating in the annual Easter Sunday celebration of the resurrection, is a contradiction that indirectly supports Sunday observance.

EVALUATION OF THE RESURRECTION

The New Testament references to the resurrection reveal the incomparable importance of the event, but they do not offer any indication regarding a special day to commemorate it. The reason is that the Resurrection was seen as an existential reality experienced by living victoriously by the power of the Risen Savior, and not a liturgical practice associated with Sunday worship.

Had Jesus wanted to memorialize the day of His Resurrection, He would have capitalized on the day of His Resurrection to make such a day the fitting memorial of that event. But none of the utterances of the risen Savior reveal an intent to memorialize the day of His Resurrection by making it the new Christian day of rest and worship. Biblical institutions such as the Sabbath, Baptism, and the Lord’s Supper all trace their origin to a divine act that established them. But there is no such divine act for the institution of a weekly Sunday or an annual Easter Sunday memorial of the Resurrection

The silence of the New Testament on this matter is very important since most of its books were written many years after Christ’s death and resurrection. If Christ or the apostles had enjoined the observance of Sunday as a memorial of the resurrection, then we should find in the New Testament some indications of such a commandment and of its observance. Instead, we find no trace of any commandment regarding the celebration of the resurrection on a weekly Sunday or annual Easter Sunday, or even of any reference where Sunday is called “the day of the resurrection” until the fourth century. The obvious reason is that in earliest centuries Sunday was not viewed as the weekly memorial of the resurrection.

ORIGIN OF EASTER SUNDAY

What most Christians ignore is that Passover was changed to Easter Sunday for the same reasons that the Sabbath was changed to Sunday. Both changes were introduced to show separation and differentiation from the Jews at a time when Emperor Hadrian adopted new repressive measures against the Jews, prohibiting categorically the observance of the Jewish religion in general and of the Sabbath and Holy Days in particular. This question is examined at great length in my dissertation FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY.

Perhaps the most explicit and forceful expression of anti-Judaism for the repudiation of the traditional Passover dating is found in the letter that Emperor Constantine formulated at the Council of Nicea in A. D. 325. In desiring to establish a religion completely free from any Jewish influence, the emperor wrote regarding Passover: "It appeared an unworthy thing that in the celebration of this most holy feast we should follow the practice of the Jews, who have impiously defiled their hands with enormous sin, and are, therefore, deservedly afflicted with blindness of soul. . . . Let us then have nothing in common with the detestable Jewish crowd: for we have received from our Savior a different way. . . . Strive and pray continually that the purity of your soul may not seem in anything to be sullied by fellowship with the custom of these most wicked men. . . . All should unite in desiring that which sound reason appears to demand, avoiding all participation in the perjured conduct of the Jews."

The Council of Nicea (A. D. 325) put an end to the controversy over the date of Passover by decreeing that it should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon of spring. To ensure that Easter-Sunday would never be celebrated at the same time as the Jewish Passover, the council decreed that if the 14th of Nisan fell on a Sunday, then Easter was to be celebrated on the following Sunday.

Nicea represents the culmination of the Passover controversy initiated two centuries earlier and motivated by strong anti-Judaic feelings. Unfortunately, the controversy was "settled" at Nicea, not Biblically but politically. It was settled by suppressing the traditional observance of Passover and by adopting instead Easter-Sunday as championed by the church of Rome.

Summing up, the celebration of Christ's resurrection on the weekly Sunday and annual Easter Sunday is a post-apostolic phenomenon, devoid of biblical support. These festivals were introduced to enable Gentile Christians to show separation and differentiation from the Jews and identification with the Roman society. What most Christians ignore is that the adoption of weekly Sunday and Easter Sunday was motivated more by hate for the Jews than love for Jesus Christ. It was because of expediency rather than obedience to God's commandments.

WHAT CHRIST'S RESURRECTION MEANS TO ME

While the Christian world celebrates the Christ's resurrection liturgically through a church service, Seventh-day Adventists can capitalize on this occasion by reflecting on the personal, existential meaning of the resurrection. The seven points represent a summary of a sermon I was invited to preach on what the resurrection means to me.

(1) *Christ's resurrection tells me that truth is stronger than falsehood.* "You seek to kill me," Jesus said, "a man who told you the truth" (John 8:40). Jesus was put to death because He spoke and revealed the truth about God and His plan for our salvation. If Christ's enemies had succeeded in silencing Christ for ever, then falsehood would have been stronger than truth. For me the resurrection is the final guarantee of the indestructibility of truth.

(2) *Christ's resurrection tells me that good is stronger than evil.* The forces that crucified Christ were the forces of evil. Jesus said: "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desire. He was a murdered from the beginning and has

nothing to do with the truth" (John 8:44). If Christ had not risen there would be no hope that goodness will ultimately triumph over evil.

(3) Christ's resurrection tells me that love is stronger than hate. It was virulent hatred that procured Christ's crucifixion. It was hatred that ascribed Christ's healing to the power of the devil. If there was no resurrection it would mean that human hatred had conquered God's love. The resurrection is the triumph of God's love over all what human hatred could do.

(4) Christ's resurrection tells me that life is stronger than death. If Jesus had not risen again, it would have meant that death had power even over the loveliest and best life that ever lived. Between the cracks of the ruins of a church in London bombed during the World War II, some corn plants came out. As the bombs could not destroy the life of the corn-seeds so death could not destroy Christ's life. The resurrection is the final proof that death cannot destroy God's gift of life.

(5) Christ's resurrection tells me, not only that Christ died to pay the penalty of my sins, but also that He lives to empower me to live victoriously. Some Christians focus on Christ's crib and other on His Cross, but ultimately it is His resurrection that gives us the reassurance that "He is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25). The resurrection tells me that Christ is not on vacation recovering from the exhaustion of His earthly mission, but He is actively working at the right hand of God (Eph 1:20) to bring to consummation the redemption he accomplished on this earth.

(6) Christ's resurrection assures me that God preserves the identity and individuality of those who have fallen asleep until the Day of the resurrection. The resurrected Christ was recognized by His followers, because He was the same Christ they had known before His death. In the same way the resurrected saints will be recognized by their loved ones because God preserves and will restore the identity of each person.

(7) Christ's resurrection gives me reason to believe in my own resurrection on the glorious day of His coming. Being "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor 15:20), Christ's resurrection has a profound eschatological meaning. The early Christians grasped this meaning when they greeting one another saying, "Marantha-the Lord is Coming." The Lord is coming because He is risen. His resurrection is the prefiguration of our resurrection.

Ultimately the meaning of the resurrection is an existential reality in the lives of those who experience "the power of his resurrection" (Phil 3:10) as the motivating force for living, loving, and serving the risen Lord.

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSON: APRIL 8-14 “CREATION AND THE SECOND ADVENT”

Many of you have encouraged me to post few comments on our weekly Sabbath School Lesson. I will endeavor to offer this service when time permits. Rather than duplicating the content of the lesson, I would rather share few thoughts that can enrich the theme of the lesson. I may change the format, after I retire on June 1, 2000. Hopefully I will have more time to think.

THE ADVENT HOPE IS ROOTED IN CREATION

The expectation of a coming Redeemer appears in various forms during the course of biblical history. The foundation of this expectation is to be found in the creation story which portrays God's initial coming into this world to bring order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos.

In a sense the understanding of the doctrine of Last Things, known as eschatology, is determined by the understanding of the doctrine of First Things, known as etiology. A person who views God's initial visitation to this planet to accomplish creation as unscientific, irrational, and unacceptable will naturally reject as equally unscientific and irrational the Biblical teaching of Christ's final Return to accomplish the restoration of this world.

The purpose of God's creation is best expressed in the blessing of mankind on the sixth day of creation (Gen 1:27-28), which is followed immediately by the blessing of the seventh day (Gen 2:2-3). Through the first act God promised mankind abundant life (“be fruitful and multiply”) and “dominion”; through the second He offered the assurance of His presence and fellowship. By taking time out on the seventh day of creation (Gen 2:2-3) to fellowship with His creatures, God revealed His purpose for the creation of this planet, namely, to share His personal presence and fellowship with His creatures.

This sublime picture is the basis of the future Advent Hope, since it reveals a ground of hope. It tells us that God visited mankind at creation to promise a glorious future destiny not yet fully attained—a future of sovereignty and companionship with God.

When Eden was lost, God's initial promise of dominion and fellowship became the basis for the expectation of the Coming of the Lord to restore creation to its original perfection. In the next lesson we shall see how the Sabbath, being the symbol of primordial perfection, peace, rest, and delight, served to epitomize and nourish the hope of the expected Messiah.

ORIGINAL CREATION IS PREVIEW OF FINAL RESTORATION

What God accomplished when He came down to the planet the first time to create human and subhuman life, serves as a paradigm of what the Lord will accomplish when He returns to restore this planet to its original perfection. In the Old Testament the final salvation inaugurated by the Coming of the Lord is not an *escape from* but a *transformation of* this world. The “new heavens and a new earth” (Is 65:17) are not a remote and inconsequential world somewhere off in space; rather they are the present heaven and earth renewed to their original perfection. “The wilderness becomes a fruitful field” (Is 32:15) and “the wolf shall dwell with the lamb” (Is 11:6).

The Old Testament opens with the sevenfold proclamation that God's original creation was “very good.” The seventh day was divinely established as a memorial to the perfection and goodness of God's creation. This vision of the peace, harmony, material prosperity, and delight of the primordial Sabbath—Adam's *First Day* after his creation—functions in Old Testament times as the paradigm of the *Last Days*, a common designation for the world to come.

The New Testament vision of God's new world is basically the same as that of the Old Testament. The New Testament authors do not speak of an ethereal heaven where glorified souls will spend eternity wearing white robes, singing, plucking harps, praying, chasing clouds, and drinking milk of ambrosia, but rather they speak of this planet being purified, transformed, and perfected at and through the Coming of the Lord (2 Pet 3:11-13; Rom 8:19-25; Rev 21:1).

Paul speaks in Romans 8 about this present human and subhuman creation which eagerly longs to be liberated "from its bondage to decay" (Rom 8:19-23). As in the Old Testament, this new world inaugurated by Christ's return is not another world, but it is this earth and this heaven, restored to their original perfection (Rev 21:1-4).

Believers enter into the new earth, not as disembodied souls, but as resurrected bodily persons (Rev 20:4; John 4:28-29; 1 Thess 4:14-17). Though nothing unclean shall enter the New Jerusalem, we are told that "the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, . . . they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations" (Rev 21:24, 26). These verses suggest that everything of real worth in the old heaven and earth, including the achievements of man's inventive artistic, and intellectual prowess, will find a place in the eternal order. The very image of "the city" conveys the idea of activity, vitality, creativity, and real relationships.

It is regrettable that this fundamentally earthly view of God's new world which derives from the doctrine of God's good original creation, has largely been lost and replaced in popular piety with an ethereal, spiritualized concept of heaven. The latter has made well-meaning persons indifferent if not resentful toward the Second Advent, since they mistakenly view such an event as the end of their real life on this earth. It is imperative, therefore, to recover the biblical realistic view of the original creation, in order to grasp the reality of the ultimate restoration to be accomplished Christ's return.

A Thank You Note

Thank you for inviting your friends to subscribe to our newsletters. As a result of your efforts over 10,000 people are receiving these Bible studies. Thank you for granting me the opportunity to share my ministry of Biblical research.

May the Lord continue to richly bless your life and witness for Him.

Christian regards
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